

Important topics for UPOCs

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- 2) CCorps PHS Organizational Structure
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Pay/Compensation

Q1. What pay can a newly commissioned officer expect?

Compensation varies depending on factors such as grade/rank, years of training and experience (T & E) in your profession, [base pay entry date](#) (BPED), specialty training, geographic location of your duty station, and dependency status. The minimum **starting pay grade/rank** for a pharmacist in the PHS Commissioned Corps is O-2 (LTJG), but if you have a PharmD., then you start as an O-3 (LT). Graduates receive 8 years of T & E credit for schooling leading to the PharmD. degree, no matter how many years it actually took to obtain that degree. Additional T & E credit is earned for time spent after receipt of the qualifying degree in **degree-related** activities. This could be:

- paid or volunteer work
- research
- further training in your field (clinical practice, General Practice Residency, etc)
- teaching at the college or university level
- allied and relevant graduate studies and/or research

Q2. Is loan repayment available?

Yes, but only with Indian Health Service assignments.

Q3. What are the different components that make up my pay/salary?

BASIC PAY

The Basic Pay portion is considered to be the officer's actual salary and is subject to Federal income tax, Social Security tax (FICA), and in most cases, state income tax. The rate of basic pay is based on the officer's temporary **grade/rank** and the **Base Pay Entry Date** (BPED). The BPED is usually the officer's call-to-active-duty date, although it may be adjusted for prior service in other Uniformed Services. The second important date is the **Training and Experience date** (T & E) which reflects the officer's creditable training and experience related to the officer's professional category/specialty and determines rank and promotion eligibility. The initial rate of Basic Pay is determined by the officer's BPED and rank. Subsequent increases in base pay result from length of service and promotion to the next higher rank. To review the basic pay rates, log on to <http://www.dod.mil/dfas/>. To compute your regular military compensation based on your inputs, log on to <http://www.dod.mil/militarypay/pay/calc/index.html>.

ALLOWANCES

Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) is a monthly allowance payable to all officers at the same rate regardless of rank/BPED unless meals are provided by the Service. BAS is non-taxable.

Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH) is a monthly allowance payable to all officers stationed within the Continental United States (CONUS), including Alaska and Hawaii. It provides compensation for housing rental, renters insurance, and utilities. The rate is determined by the officer's permanent duty station zip code, grade, and dependency status. If an officer is assigned to government housing (does not live on the economy), he/she will not be entitled to this allowance. BAH is non-taxable.

Cola Allowance (CCOLA) is a monthly allowance payable to certain duty stations that are considered high cost areas within the Continental United States. It provides compensation for variations in non-housing expenditures to adjust to regional cost differences within CONUS. The rate is determined by the officer's permanent duty station zip code, grade, and dependency status. CCOLA is taxable.

Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) is a monthly allowance paid to officers stationed out of the Continental United States (OUTCONUS), other than Alaska and Hawaii, who live on the local economy. It provides compensation for housing rental plus compensates for utility/recurring maintenance. The monthly amount payable is based on comparing the officer's rent, up to a rental ceiling for the duty location and adds on an allowance for utility/recurring maintenance for that location. The rent cap and utility allowance is determined by grade and dependent status for each location. OHA is non-taxable.

Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) is a monthly allowance paid to officers stationed in high-cost areas out of the Continental United States (OUTCONUS), including Alaska and Hawaii. It provides purchasing power so the officer can purchase about the same goods and services overseas as in the United States. The rate established is based on the officer's grade, base pay entry date, and the actual number of dependents residing in his or her household. COLA is non-taxable

Log on to <http://www.dod.mil/dfas/> to obtain specific rates for any of the above allowances at your desired duty location.

SPECIAL PAY

There are a number of special pays that are applicable to several specialties. These special pays consist of monthly pays. For special pay information, go to <http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/>.

Q4. What is loan repayment?

Many students find the Indian Health Service (IHS) Loan Repayment Program (LRP) one of the most significant benefits that we offer. Commissioned Corps, Civil Service and direct Tribal hire employees are all eligible to apply for a Loan Repayment Program (LRP) Award. Priority is given to sites with historically critical staff shortages. If the employee is awarded loan repayment, he or she agrees to work for two years in full-time clinical practice at an IHS facility or in an approved Indian health program. Once the application process is successfully completed, the LRP repays all, or a portion of, the new hire's eligible health professional educational with an award of up to \$24,000 (including allocation for taxes) per year. Individuals are eligible for amounts up to an additional \$24,000 per year for each year of service until school loans are completely repaid. Please note that there are heavy penalties imposed on the officer for breaking the LRP contract.

Check out the links below for the most up-to-date information.

<http://www.ihs.gov/JobsCareerDevelop/DHPS/LRP/index.asp>
<http://www.pharmacy.ihs.gov/index.cfm?module=loan>



[Loan Repayment Application and Info Booklet \(1.3 MB\)](#)



[Sample Contract \(214 KB\)](#)

Q5. Explain VSP and AB.

Bonuses-All pharmacists are eligible for both contractual special pay bonuses and monthly special pay bonuses, which include:

- **Accession Bonus (AB)** — \$30,000 at sign-up with a 4-year active duty contract
- **Variable Special Pay (VSP)** — paid monthly, special pay ranges from \$3,000 to \$12,000 annually based on years of creditable service
- **Board Certified Pay (BCP)** for board certified pharmacists — paid monthly, special pay ranges from \$2,500 to \$6,000 annually based on years of creditable service. All special pays are taxable income.

Q6. How many days of annual leave?

30 days paid annual leave earned yearly, **2.5** days accrued monthly, with the ability to carry over up to 60 days of annual leave from calendar year to calendar year.

Q7. What is TSP?

Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a retirement savings and investment plan that has been available to civilian employees of the Federal government since 1987. It allows participants to save a portion of their pay in a special retirement account administered by the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board. The money that participants invest in the TSP comes from **pre-tax dollars** and reduces their current taxable income; investments and earnings are not taxed until they are withdrawn. Key points about Uniformed Services' participation in TSP are included below.

- Participation is optional and not automatic.
- Officers may enroll at any time.
- An officer will be able to deposit up to 10 percent of basic pay earned **monthly**, along with 1-100% of special pay and bonuses up to a combined ceiling of \$15,500 per year.
- Participation in the TSP does not affect an officer's ability to contribute to an Individual Retirement Account (IRA).
- **The amount of money an officer contributes and the earnings attributable to those contributions belong to the officer for him/her to keep even if he/she does not serve the 20 years necessary to receive military retired pay. .**
- Any portion of an officer's TSP account can be invested in the five TSP investment funds or the new L funds:
 - Government Securities Investment (G) Fund
 - Fixed Income Index Investment (F) Fund
 - Common Stock Index Investment (C) Fund
 - Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) Fund
 - International Stock Index Investment (I) Fund
 - Lifecycle funds

TSP will invest contributions from new participants in the G Fund until a contribution allocation from the officer is submitted to the TSP record keeper (National Finance Center of the U.S. Department of Agriculture). Once the officer's TSP account is established, an introductory letter and a Personal Identification Number (PIN) will be sent to the officer along with a TSP-U-50-FUNDS Allocation Form. The officer will then be able to make a contribution allocation to invest future contributions in any of the five investment funds.

Visit <http://www.tsp.gov> for more information...

Commissioned Corps PHS Organizational Structure

Q1. Who is the leader of the CC?

The Surgeon General (SG) is the leader of the CC. The SG reports to the Assistant Secretary for Health and in turn the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Visit <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/> or <http://www.hhs.gov/ophs/assistantsecretaryhealth/> for more information.

Q2. Who is the Secretary of HHS?

Secretary Michael O. Leavitt. Prior to his current service, Leavitt served as head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and three-term Governor of Utah. Visit <http://www.hhs.gov/secretary/> for more information.

Q3. What does SAMHSA stand for and what is their mission?

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; SAMHSA is achieving that vision through a mission that is both action-oriented and measurable: to build resilience and facilitate recovery for people with or at risk for substance abuse and mental illness. In collaboration with the States, national and local community-based and faith-based organizations, and public and private sector providers, SAMHSA is working to ensure that people with or at risk for a mental or addictive disorder have the opportunity for a fulfilling life that includes a job, a home, and meaningful relationships with family and friends. To bring that mission and vision from paper to practice, SAMHSA's budget and its policy and program activities - including discretionary grant programs and communications initiatives - have been aligned to reflect a series of core priority areas, among them: co-occurring mental and substance abuse disorders, criminal justice, children and families, aging, substance abuse treatment capacity, strategic prevention framework for substance abuse, mental health system transformation, homelessness, disaster readiness and response, seclusion and restraint, and HIV/AIDS. The priority program areas are linked to crosscutting principles that help ensure that SAMHSA's work will meet the highest standards, driven by a strategy to improve Accountability, Capacity, and Effectiveness - ACE. With this strategy, SAMHSA can assure that its resources are used both wisely and well in State and community programs to treat addiction and dependence, to prevent substance abuse, and to provide mental health services. Visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/> for more information.

Q4. What does OCCO stand for? What is their role?

Office of Commissioned Corps Operations; OCCO is located in the Office of the Surgeon General and carries out the day-to-day management and administration of major commissioned corps operational functions. OCCO conducts recruitment; commissioned corps boards; issues personnel orders; oversees the performance, discipline and conduct of commissioned officers; collaborates with the Office of Commissioned Corps Force Management on the development and the implementation of policies and regulations; and advises the Assistant Secretary for Health and the Surgeon General on matters related to operations management of the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

Q5. What are the seven uniformed services?

USPHS, Coast Guard, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Q6. What are the professional categories represented in the PHS CC?

Pharmacy, Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Veterinarian, Engineer, Dietician, Therapist, Scientist, Health Services, Environmental Health

Q7. What is Regular Corps? What is Reserve Corps?

The Regular Corps is the career component of the PHS Commissioned Corps and is restricted to a maximum of 2,800 officers. Career-oriented officers in the Reserve Corps who have long-term commitments to the mission and goals of the Service may apply for assimilation into the Regular Corps after completing two years of continuous active duty. A reserve corps officer must complete three consecutive years of continuous active duty (the probationary period), before he/she is eligible to be reviewed by an assimilation board. The requirement to serve three years of continuous active duty applies not only to the first tour of active duty, but to any subsequent tours of active duty as a reserve corps officer. As of October 2006, there are 2009 Regular Corps officers.

The Active Reserve Corps supplements the Regular Corps and may expand or contract according to the needs and resources of the PHS. All newly-appointed officers are commissioned in the Reserve Corps and serve a 3-year probationary period. As of October 2006, there are 3900 Active Reserve Corps officers.

Q8. What does AHRQ stand for and what is their mission?

Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research; AHRQ, a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the lead agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of healthcare, reduce its cost, improve patient safety, decrease medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that provides evidence-based information on healthcare outcomes; quality; and cost, use, and access. The information helps healthcare decision makers—patients and clinicians, health system leaders, and policymakers—make more informed decisions and improve the quality of healthcare services. Visit <http://www.ahrq.gov/> for more information.

Q9. What are the Core Values of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service?

Leadership: Provides vision and purpose in public health through inspiration, dedication, and loyalty.

Service: Demonstrates a commitment to public health through compassionate actions and stewardship of time, resources, and talents.

Integrity: Exemplifies uncompromising ethical conduct and maintains the highest standards of responsibility and accountability.

Excellence: Exhibits superior performance and continuous improvement in knowledge and expertise.

Q10. What is the uniform allowance for new officers?

An officer called to active duty with the PHS for the first time is entitled to a one-time uniform allowance of \$250. This dollar amount will not cover all uniform expenses but will allow you to purchase a basic uniform of some type. Every officer is required to own a Service Dress Blue Uniform.

In addition to reviewing CCPM Pamphlet 61, "*Uniform Handbook*", new officers are recommended to attend the Basic Officer Training Course (BOTC) to gain an in-depth knowledge of correct uniform wear, required grooming standards when in uniform, and uniformed service customs and courtesies. A listing of available course dates is maintained on the web site of the Commissioned Officer Training Academy at <http://dcp.psc.gov/COTA/default.asp>

COSTEP

Q1. What is Junior COSTEP?

The U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP) allow students to gain valuable professional experience with the PHS early in their education. JRCOSTEP participants serve in assignments throughout the country during their official school breaks for periods from **31 to 120 days**. Although opportunities can be offered throughout the year, most JRCOSTEP participants are hired for the summer months (June, July, and August). JRCOSTEP participants **do not have an obligation** to serve in the PHS Commissioned Corps after graduation. However, upon completing his/her professional education, the student may serve on extended active-duty assignment with any of the Agencies/Operating Divisions (OPDIVs)/Programs that accept PHS commissioned officers for assignment. Former JRCOSTEP participants who go on to a career in the PHS Commissioned Corps receive credit for their JRCOSTEP time for active duty pay and retirement purposes.

Q2. What is Senior COSTEP?

The Senior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (SRCOSTEP) is designed to assist students financially during the final academic year of their qualifying degree in return for an agreement to work for the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps after graduation. The payback service obligation is equal to twice the time sponsored, i.e., an 18-month employment commitment for 9 months of financial support. Upon graduation, assignments are made to the sponsoring Operating Division (OPDIV)/Staff Division (STAFFDIV)/non-Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) organization to which the officer is assigned that provided the financial support.

Q3. How does one apply for either of the above?

Application for Appointment (form PHS-50)
<http://www.usphs.gov/assets/applets/Phs-50.pdf>

You may call and request an application from the Office of Commissioned Corps Operations, Division of Commissioned Corps Assignments (DCCA), at (800) 279-1605, Monday - Friday 8:00 am - 4:30 pm Eastern Time (except Federal Holidays). After hours, leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible.

Q4. What agency(s) uses the COSTEP program?

Participants work in the following HHS OPDIVs:

- [Indian Health Service](#) (most common)
- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#);
- [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#);
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#);
- [Food and Drug Administration](#);
- [Health Resources and Services Administration](#);
- [National Institutes of Health](#);
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#); and
- [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#).

Participants also work in non-HHS organizations that include the following:

- [Federal Bureau of Prisons](#) (most common)
- [Environmental Protection Agency](#);
- Department of Homeland Security:
 - [U. S Citizenship and Immigration Services](#);
 - [U.S. Coast Guard](#);
- [Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#);
- [U. S. Marshals Service](#);
- [National Park Service](#); and
- [U. S. Department of Agriculture](#).

Q5. What online source is available to find information about the COSTEP?

<http://www.usphs.gov>

Advanced Training

Q1. What is BOTC?

Officers attending the 3-day BOTC will receive an introduction to the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Emphasis is placed on the corps as a Uniformed Service. This course is presented at a faster pace in recognition of the experience and knowledge gained by officers while serving on active duty. Military bearing and courtesy, career development, promotions, leave, compensation, awards, and resource utilization are some of the many topics introduced during this course. Officers successfully completing this course will satisfy the prerequisite for enrollment in the web-based Independent Officer Training Course (IOTC) with Examination Series, thus making them eligible to earn the Commissioned Corps Training Ribbon.

Officers attending the 5-day BOTC will receive an introduction to the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Emphasis is placed on the corps as a Uniformed Service. This course is designed primarily to assist the transition of new and Senior COSTEP officers to the corps. Military bearing and courtesy, career development, promotions, leave, compensation, awards, and resource utilization are some of the many topics introduced during this course. Officers successfully completing this course will satisfy the prerequisite for enrollment in the web-based Independent Officer Training Course (IOTC) with Examination Series, thus making them eligible to earn the Commissioned Corps Training Ribbon

Officers attending the 14 day BOTC receive an in-depth orientation to the Commissioned Corps as described above, as well as preparation for deployment with the Office of Force Readiness and Deployment.

Q2. What is IOTC?

The Independent Officer Training Course (IOTC) is an independent study course that may be undertaken by Commissioned Corps Officers who have completed the Basic Officer Training Course (BOTC). The course, through specialized modules, will delve further into Uniformed Service theory, uniformed dress, protocol, organization, personnel issues, etc. Each module will include testable components that will be scored. Officers must meet or exceed the established score minimum in order to satisfy module requirements. Officers will be required to master material and demonstrate a more in-depth knowledge of an array of topics. The course will not only serve to reinforce and expand information covered during the resident BOTC phase, but also serve to introduce other topics useful to Commissioned Officers.

Information about IOTC will be given to officers when attending BOTC. Officers enrolled in the IOTC will work at their own pace. Those undertaking intense study can conceivably complete the IOTC in 2 to 3 weeks. Officers working at a slower pace may complete the course work within an estimated 3 to 4 months.

Upon the successful completion of both the BOTC and IOTC, officers will be awarded the PHS Commissioned Corps Training Ribbon.

Q3. What is Long term training and how does one apply for it?

Long term training positions are sponsored on an as-needed basis. These opportunities can include general practice residencies, clinical specialty training, MPH programs and public health residencies, although not all of these are available every year. Either the IHS, an Area, or a Service Unit can sponsor long term training. Application criteria for such trainings are determined by the sponsoring program.

Appointment Standards

Q1. What is the maximum age allowable to be commissioned? What, if any, exceptions can be made?

Applicant must be under 44 years of age (age may be offset by prior active-duty Uniformed Service time and/or civil service work experience in a PHS agency at a PHS site at a level commensurate with the duties of a commissioned officer); Have served less than 8 years of active duty if you are/were a member of another Uniformed Service. Occasionally, an exception is made for particularly hard to fill assignments but is at the discretion of the Director of OCCO and a request for waiver must be filed.

Q2. What source of information is used by the appointment board to determine T & E date?

Answer: PHS –50 <http://www.usphs.gov/assets/applets/Phs-50.pdf>